37.42
22 gp

THE GLASTONBURY PENNY.

A Criticism.

By R. W. McLachlan.

IN 1883, an article entitled "*A Baltimore Penny*," appeared in the September number of the "*Magazine of American History*". In it the author, after describing a modern English trade token, which he attributes to Lord Baltimore, states that it was struck for the colony which that nobleman attempted to plant in Newfoundland in 1626. The whole article displayed such an utter want of practical knowledge of numismatics, on the part of the author, that Mr. Appleton, the editor of the "*American Journal of Numismatics*," characterized it as an "illustration of the folly of any other than a professional undertaking to write on Numismatics."

Last January I described this coin in that journal; showing that it is one of the many trade tokens that were issued in England, during the years 1811–15, on account of the depression caused by the Napoleonic wars; and that it was struck for the town of Glastonbury. It was with some surprise then, that, on looking over the October number of the "*Magazine of American History*," I noticed that Mr. H. W. Richardson, had written another Numismatic article. In this article, after recounting in the most thrilling manner his search after a pedigree for his pet penny, or "Glastonbury Medal," as he now styles it, he seeks to atone for, or rather to gloss over, the glaring errors of the previous article. And, while still exhibiting ignorance of the subject, he grows highly sarcastic over Mr. Appleton's classification of him among the non-professionals. And because Mr. Appleton, one of the best American authorities on Numismatic questions; because Mr. Poole, the chief of the Medal room in the British Museum; because Mr. Webster, an English connoisseur, and others could not off hand furnish the requisite information, he at once jumps to the conclusion that he is as good an authority as they. That is, one who had previously only given the subject a passing thought, or who had gleaned such information as could be secured in a cursory glance through books, writing with as much confidence as those who had devoted their whole lifetime to the study, because they had confessed ignorance on an obscure and insignificant point.

58926

But why, some no doubt will ask, could not these learned
n readily clear up the mist that obscured the history of
s simple token? The following among other reasons
y serve as an answer.

st. The science of Numismatics is as wide as geography,
ep as history and broad as commerce; in which subjects
students should be thoroughly grounded. And
ides this the true Numismatician should know, aye and
es to a great extent know, the history of civilization, the
toms and manners, the literature and art of all nations
l ages. He must also understand weights and measures
l something of metallurgy.

nd. There are many hundreds of thousands of different
ds and varieties of Coins which are classified under diff-
nt groups, such as Greek, Roman, Mediæval, Oriental
l Modern. And these groups may again be subdivided;
of which subdivisions, properly collected and described,
y require the whole time of more than one professional.

3rd. This penny belongs to a subdivision which, while re-
ring less general knowledge than most of the others, ne-
sitates a special knowledge of its own which relates to few
ny disputed or dark points in history.

th. Collectors who confine their attention to the provincial
desmen's tokens of Great Britian, as this class is called,
the less prominent Numismaticians. Their work is con-
ently little known and their names seldom appear prom-
ntly before the general public.

From these facts it will doubtless be seen that the science
ndeed extensive and that, while Mr. Appleton may be
own as an authority on American, Mr. Poole * on oriental,
l Mr. Webster on Greek and Roman Coins, neither can
supposed to hold the minor details of any but his
n group within his grasp. And yet they all, from their
neral knowledge of the subject, could strike pretty near
truth as to age and place of mintage of most coins sub-
tted to them for inspection.

It can thus be easily seen that if one of the less promi-
nt Numismaticians had been consulted—an unpretending
lector of "provincial tokens"—he would have at once

* Mr. Poole has published seven or eight volumes of the catalogue of orien-
oins in the British Museum. The coins of this series, so unde-
erable to ordinary men, are therein accurately described and arragned.

named the Coin produced a specimen from his carefully arranged cabinet and recounted, perhaps, such of its history as is still known. Mr. Batty, of Manchester, who pretends to no distinction as a Numismatist, has writen on the subject, having described and classified the whole of this subdivision, of over fifteen thousand varieties, in a work entitled "*Batty's Descriptive Catalogue of the Copper Coinage of the British Empire.*"

But to illustrate the point by a subject which is to most people more familar. From the manner in which Mr. Richardson rushes off into quotations on the slighest provocation, some of them rather pedantic or far fetched, he may be considered a literateur—an authority on books. Now should he be unable to name the author of a commonplace quotation from an obscure English pamphlet of the sixteenth century, would any one question his literary knowledge; while a collector of such literature—a man of no reputation could without difficulty give the requisite infarmation. Would any one conclude that this pamphlet collector was as good an authority on books in general as he who could cite Homer and Horace by the page.

He attempts to palliate his mistakes by stating that the coin was only used as a text and that "the substance of the article was an historical sketch of Lord Baltimore's career and particularly of his attempt to plant a colony at Ferryland." But, with him, this penny is more than a text, it is the title of the article; and in his own peculiar way he clusters the history of Lord Baltimore's colonization scheme around it. And in his conclusion deduces that:—"There can be no doubt that the Avalon penny with its quaint inscriptions was coined by this ingenious nobleman" (Lord Baltmore.) While the use of Coins as texts for historical papers is highly to be commended, containing as they do within themselves snatches of history epitomized, and while the use of one of old Avalon, as a text for a history for the new, may be pardoned, wrong conclusions, drawn by one entirely ignorant of the subject, except by what has been culled in a cursory glance through books, cannot be condoned.

Again, in his second article, Mr. Richardson goes on to state:—"That Messrs Boulton and Watt had considered thoroughly the dangers to which a public Coinage is exposed. Their pennies had engrailed or indented edges to prevent clipping or filing. * * * * * It is reasonably

certain, therefore, that the piece was executed at Soho after, but probably not long after, the Coinage of 1797." Now how do these statements agree with facts? The Coinage of 1797 was not engrailed although that of 1799 was but consisted only of halfpence and farthings.

The engrailing or milling of copper coins was not intended as a safe guard against clipping or filing, as no profit that could be realized out of the operation would be sufficient to tempt any ones cupidity.

Mr. Richardson thinks it remarkable "that it should now be unknown in Glastonbury, while two specemins are in the collection of the Boston Numismatic Society." But here again crops out the unprofessional. The Coin is common as are most of the English ninteenth century trade tokens. There is probably hardly any considerable collection of such tokens, which does contain a specimen of this Glastonbury coin. The inference to be drawn, from this deficiency of knowledge with regard to their own coinage, on the part of the inhabitants of that town, is that there are no collections of provincial tokens within its limits. The same ignorance might be found to be true with regard to other towns, where tokens have been issued. Take one that, from its proximity to his own place of residence, will make the point clearer to Mr. Richardson. In the year 1837, a trade token was struck for a business firm in the town of Dover, N. H., and although a very common coin, I will venture to say that few if any of its citizens know anything about that coin, none, perhaps except its coin collectors.

From these errors, or rather egregious blunders, made by one who writes with all the assurance of a connoisseur, can we wonder that Mr. Appleton should express himself so strongly with regard to any but professionals writing on Numismatic subjects. The expression professional, as Mr. Appleton uses it in his criticism, is not intended to include a deeply learned Numismatician nor necessarily a coin expert, but simply a careful and studious collector. For by no amount of reading, by no amount of deep study, without the constant handling, comparing and arranging of coins themselves, can any man become a professional, and it is folly for any to otherwise attempt to write intelligently on the subject.